A passion for collecting fills two museums

By BONNIE REYNELL
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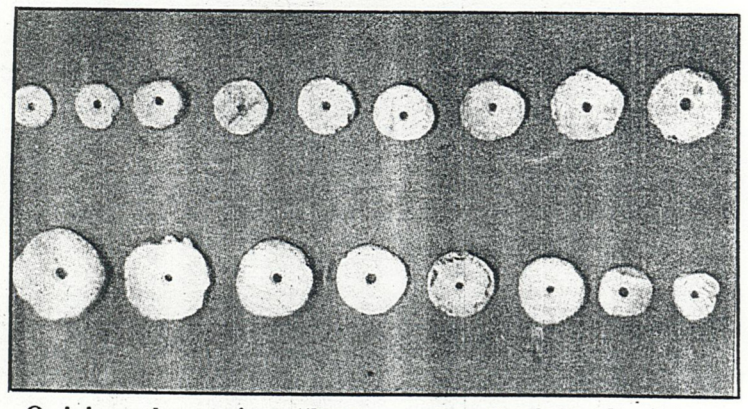
Mario Odor, an Aruban with a passion for collecting and a love of history, is the motivating force behind two small and intriguing museums on the island.

The Numismatic Museum of Aruba, where Mario is curator, houses this avid collector's private coin and banknote collection. The museum opened in November 1981 under auspices of the government of Aruba, 26 years after Mario was inspired to begin accumulating his by now extensive collection.

The museum's first exhibit, "Initiation coins," tells the story: As Mario was digging in his flower garden, by chance on his 36th birthday, he unearthed two silver coins. One was a shilling dating from 1790, the other was a half shilling dating from 1788. This find sparked the idea of collecting coins and paper money, Mario writes in the text accompanying the two coins.

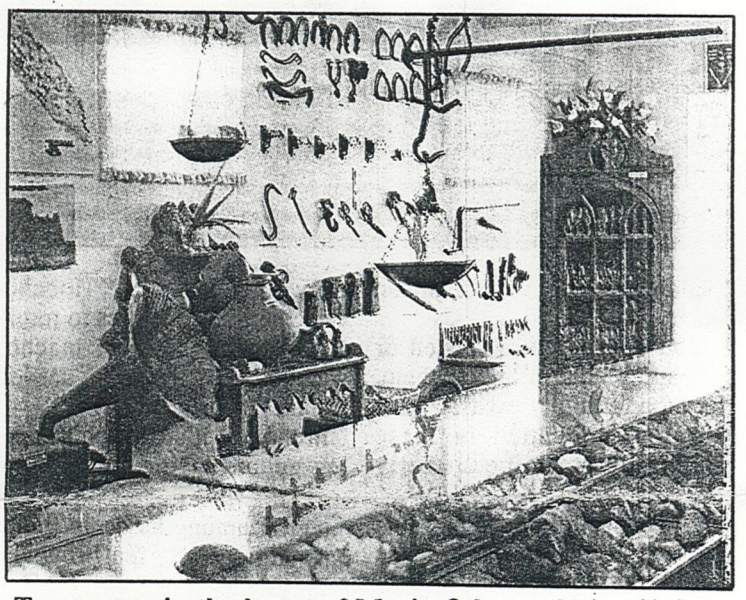
Mario's collection, housed in a picturesque egg-blue house at Zuidstraat 7 in Oranjestad, just a short block east of Fort Zoutman, comprises more than 33,000 different items from over 400 countries. The collection contains more than 110 sub-collections such as primitive, strange, zoo, proof, counter-stamp, overstruck, mini, chop-coins, errors, leprosarium, gold, ration, dollars and crowns, commemoratives, centerholed, scalloped, square, wooden-coins, tokens, medals, food-coupons and so on.

Amongst the ancient and modern specimens of currency from all over the world, coins and banknotes of Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles bring the collection closer to home. The "yotins' for example, date from the early 19th century. Spanish pieces of eight were chopped in quarters or fifths for the first time in 1815, to be used on the islands of the Netherlands Antilles as small change. The name is a corruption of the word "guillotine," the instrument used to make the divisions, Mario's son Ruben explained to **Aruba Today**. This small change was in use up until the beginning of the 20th century.



Quiripa, the ancient "button money" of the Caribbean, was once used to trade women, pay taxes and buy wheat.

In 1835 3,000 Dutch guilders were chopped in quarters but never used, because the governor of the Netherlands Antilles was against mutilating the image of the Dutch king's head, Ruben added.



Two rooms in the home of Mario Odor and his wife Inez house the "Museo Antiguedad Aruba," with its intriguing collection of rocks, fossils, artifacts, photographs, furniture and household items.

Photos by Bonnie Reynell

Ruben often helps out in the museum by giving groups of visitors guided tours and, like his father, has an extraordinary knowledge of the history behind the collection.

Other curious coins are the quiripa, the "button money" of the Caribbean. Quiripa are flat pieces of shell shaped into small discs with a hole in the center and were used as money by natives living along the coastlines of Colombia, Venezuela and the Caribbean islands. This shell currency was used to trade women, pay taxes and buy wheat as well as European products.

Men carried their quiripa around their waists and arms and women used it around their necks and in their hair as an emblem of their economic wellbeing.

Many quiripa pieces have been found in a part of Aruba named "boton" (meaning button) by the Spanish. This may have been the site of a quiripa mint, while other historians have supported the theory that Aruba was once an important commercial center and may have been the home of a chieftain, Mario writes in an article in the World Coin News on this primitive form of coinage.

Last year Mario opened the "Museo Antiguedad Aruba" at his home in the Timbalstraat 11. This small museum, tucked away in a residential area, can be visited by appointment. It houses a wide cross-section of Aruban heritage, including rocks collected from all over the island by Mario and his wife Inez, fossils of sharks teeth dating from the time when Aruba was beneath the sea, fragments of European clay pipes from early settlers, old photographs, irons, sewing machines, water jugs, oil lamps and much more.

A foreman for many years at the Department of Public Works, Mario collected as a hobby. Besides making up his own collections of rocks, coins, pipes and so on, he saved items of furniture and household utensils handed down in his family. These carefully preserved objects are now all part of the collection at the "Aruban Museum of Antiquity."

Anyone wishing to visit the museum can do so by making an appointment at the Numismatic Museum of Aruba at Zuidstraat 7.❑